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# AN ARTISAN OF SCOUTING

By Dale Hill



The sun creeps behind the Slick Hills of Western Caddo County near Cook Creek just north of Highway 58. Nearly one hundred eager campers begin to gather around a huge bonfire which shoots flames nearly twenty feet in the air. Spontaneous gasps can be heard as the campfire slowly crumbles, sending glowing embers skyward, racing to freedom as they escape their mother source but are eventually consumed by the vastness of the encompassing twilight.

A horse can be seen silhouetted against the distant trees. Anticipation can be felt even by the adult leaders. The faceless rider rides into the campfire glow. He is faceless no longer, and some of the people gathered there recognize his horse.

The adults have knowing smiles on their faces as if they have experienced this before. Neophytes are spellbound. Everyone is silent.

The rider dismounts and silently pulls a rope off the

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*The circle of the rope can be seen  
moving through the air to its victim.*

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Not one camper speaks, and those just arriving encircle the campfire quietly, enthralled with the beauty. Many of these campers are city kids who have never before seen a campfire like this. Some of the youngsters live in Lawton because their fathers or mothers are in the Army, while others from Altus are Air Force children, temporarily Oklahomans by assignment only. The fire's strength wanes, and the campers become restless.

Suddenly the sound of hoofbeats is heard, and the excitement mounts.

"Indians! Indians!" The whisper is soon spread among all campers.

saddle. Quickly he makes a small loop and begins to whip it around in a circular motion, letting more rope out gradually until the circle is huge. Again there are gasps as the elderly gentleman jumps in and out of the rope.

The artisan begins to speak, and his audience listens carefully. He tells about roping—about horsemanship. Some have heard the stories before, but they listen.

A volunteer! He wants a volunteer. Volunteers are everywhere. One is chosen and must stand many feet away. The cowboy makes a lasso and whips it around his head. The circle of the rope can be seen moving through the air to its victim. The young camper feels the rope tighten around

*Everett Cook showing a group of scouts how to ready a horse for riding.*



his arms. Quickly the old man runs over to the volunteer and ties the rope around his feet, making a loop which the cowboy extends around the camper's neck.

"An Oklahoma cowboy's dogie is now ready for branding," the man says above clapping hands. The cowboy mounts his horse and rides back toward the trees. He's gone.

Everett Cook is 80 now and has been entertaining and instructing scouts at Camp George Thomas in Southwestern Caddo County nearly fifty-five years. George Thomas, a Chickasha businessman, donated the land to the Boy Scouts of America back in 1935. Cook then lived across the road and up the creek that now bears his name.



Cook is an Oklahoma original and has never tried to commercialize his "artisanry." It has been too important to him to be commercialized. How many campers has he influenced? Who knows? Tens of thousands may be a rough estimate, but not even he knows or cares.

For many years, Everett and his wife, Ruby, lived on the campground, maintaining the area for the Scout enthusiasts.

His children, Keith and Linda (both deceased), were reared in Scouting.

These days at 80, his memories of past Summer camps are vivid, and he can remember many of the old scout masters by name. Most seasons find the elderly gentleman in Apache tending a garden, writing memories, and enjoying a semi-retired lifestyle. But when camping season rolls around, Everett Cook gets the old cowboy itch and wants to spread that itch among a group of Tenderfoot scouts just a few miles down the road. ●

*DALE W. HILL is presently Elementary Counselor for the Anadarko Public School. Along with teaching and writing, he also teaches adult education night classes at the Caddo Kiowa Vocational Technical School at Fort Cobb. This is his second contribution to WESTVIEW.*



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